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RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000931

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KS](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: JAPANESE OFFICIALS IN SEOUL DISCUSS HISTORY ISSUE

REF: A. SEOUL 659

[1](#)B. SEOUL 862

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) In a March 22 meeting with POL M/C, Japanese Embassy Political Minister Koji Tomita discussed the so-called history issue that has been a thorn in ROK-Japan relations. He said the GOJ acquired information suggesting that in late February the Chinese Ambassador to South Korea urged ROKG officials to take a "correct stance" on the history issue. Such collusion on this difficult issue was unacceptable, Japanese VFM Yachi recently told his South Korean counterpart VFM Yu Myung-hwan. Tomita also characterized as "unfeasible" President Roh Mu-hyon's proposal last week that he visit Yushukan, a controversial museum inside Yasukuni Shrine. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) During a lunch meeting on March 22, Japanese Political Minister Koji Tomita said his government obtained "sensitive" information that the Chinese Ambassador in Seoul in late February demarched Seoul to take a "correct stance" on the history issue with Japan. Tomita noted this was the first time Tokyo had obtained information that Beijing might be attempting to coordinate Japan policy with Seoul. He speculated that Beijing was probably aware that President Roh Mu-hyon would give a speech commemorating the March 1 independence movement against Japanese occupation and might have seen a need to give a warning. Beijing had decided not to improve relations with Tokyo before Prime Minister Koizumi left office in September and might have been unsure about South Korean plans.

[1](#)3. (C) Following President Roh's March 1 speech in which he criticized Japan (ref a), Tomita said that Japanese officials expressed their disappointment to Vice Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan during his March 6-8 visit to Tokyo (ref b). Yu was also told by Japanese VFM Yachi that any collusion between the ROK and China on the history issue would be unacceptable. Nevertheless, the meeting between VFM Yu and his Japanese counterpart was productive because the two seemed to get along well. This was a welcome contrast to other high-level bilateral meetings last year as well as MFA DG Sasae's inability to get along with his South Korean counterparts. Tomita noted that VFM Yu sought to address Japanese concerns about China in saying that ROK history

issues with Japan were different enough to preclude a joint approach.

14. (C) Tomita noted that former Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone had led a recent Track II delegation that met last week with President Roh. Roh had expressed his interest in visiting Yushukan, a war museum inside Yasukuni Shrine. Tomita said he heard President Roh had been considering the idea for a while and that South Korean MOFAT officials had tried, evidently unsuccessfully, to stifle it. The official position of Japan was that President Roh had a standing invitation to visit Japan, during which he was welcome to go where he pleased. Speaking personally, however, Tomita said that Tokyo was not taking the matter too seriously and saw it as "unfeasible." Tomita also speculated that this appeared to be another wild proposal from President Roh, perhaps imagining that if only he could explain the situation to Prime Minister Koizumi in Yasukuni, the PM would cease visiting it. A most unlikely scenario, Tomita surmised.

VERSHBOW